

city of my State was very badly hurt by this massive flooding.

I have come before with requests for disaster assistance. I was very hopeful we weren't going to have a disaster this year. Until these devastating events, the worst thing happening was that we appeared to have a drought in part of the State. It is truly stunning to get 20 inches of rain in 2 days.

The damage is incalculable. In North Dakota State University, there wasn't a building on the campus that was not flooded. The president informed me today that the basement of the library was badly flooded where some of the archives were kept. They were in the basement because that is the safest place in a tornado. Fargo is a town that has previously been hit by tornadoes—not frequently, but on occasion. So the most valuable materials were stored in the basement. Then we get hit by these massive monsoon rains that flooded every building on that campus, including devastating and destroying some of the archives of the State.

This is, again, a disaster of stunning proportion. Tomorrow, top officials of FEMA and I will be going to North Dakota, accompanied by top officials of the USDA, to further assess the damage. I talked to the Governor today. He tells me he is readying a request for disaster assistance. Without question, we will be coming to this body once again to ask for assistance for a remarkable set of what can only be described as almost unimaginable occurrences. It does make me wonder if there is something going on with global climate change that we don't fully understand, to have these extraordinary sets of circumstances 8 years in a row. That is the fact. That is the circumstance that we face.

I wanted to draw my colleagues' attention to it. We in North Dakota have expressed our thanks to our colleagues on repeated occasions for the assistance provided North Dakota in the face of these remarkable natural disasters. I regret very much standing here today again drawing my colleagues' attention to what has occurred in my home State. I think it is important for colleagues to know this has occurred, and that, once again, we will be asking for assistance.

I yield the floor.

HEADSTONES AND GRAVE MARKERS AMENDMENT TO DEFENSE BILL

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise today to express my appreciation to the bill managers, Chairman WARNER and Senator LEVIN, for accepting my amendment (No. 3549) regarding headstones and grave markers for veterans.

This amendment entitles each deceased veteran to an official headstone or grave marker in recognition of that veteran's contribution to this nation.

This amendment is identical to a bill I introduced last year, S. 1215, which

has the support of veterans groups such as The American Legion, The Retired Enlisted Association and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It is cosponsored by Senators BYRD, KENNEDY, SANTORUM, CONRAD, LEAHY, KOHL, FEINGOLD and LIEBERMAN.

There is no more appropriate time for this amendment. Last month, we commemorated Memorial Day. In just a few days our nation will observe Independence Day. Each of these holidays reminds us of the sacrifices made by our veterans. Today our nation is losing one thousand World War II veterans each day. And although they do not boast or brag much, we are all well aware of their monumental contribution to America's remarkable history of freedom, prosperity and political stability.

This amendment would enable their country and their families to recognize that contribution.

As anyone who has made burial arrangements for a deceased veteran knows, the Department of Veterans Affairs must provide a headstone or grave marker in recognition of that veteran's service.

What some may not know, and what this amendment would change, is that once a family places a private headstone on their veteran's grave, they forfeit their veteran's entitlement to the official VA headstone or marker.

This law has its origins in the period following the Civil War when our nation wanted to ensure that no veteran's grave went unmarked. Today, however, when virtually no one is buried in an unmarked grave, the VA headstone or grave marker serves to officially recognize a person's service in the U.S. armed forces.

The present policy generates more complaints to the VA than any other burial-related issue. About twenty thousand veterans' families contact the VA each year to register their belief that their family member is due some official recognition for his or her military service regardless of whether a private headstone has been placed on the grave.

A constituent of mine, Mr. Thomas Guzzo, first brought this matter to my attention. His father, Agostino, a U.S. army veteran, passed away in 1998.

Agostino Guzzo is interred in a mausoleum at Cedar Hill Cemetery in Hartford, but his final resting place does not bear any official military reference to his service in the U.S. Army. Agostino Guzzo's family wants an official VA marker, but, because of the policy I have described, they cannot receive one.

Faced with this predicament, Thomas Guzzo contacted me, and I attempted to straighten out what I thought to be a bureaucratic mix-up. I was surprised to realize that Thomas Guzzo's difficulties resulted not from some glitch in the system, but rather from the law itself.

I wrote to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs regarding Thomas Guzzo's very

reasonable request. The Secretary responded that his hands were tied as a result of the obscure law to which I have just referred.

This amendment is a modest means of solving an ongoing problem that continues to be a source of irritation to the families of our veterans. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that it would cost three million dollars during the first year it is in effect, and about two million dollars per year thereafter. That is a small price to pay to recognize our deceased veterans and put their families at ease.

Prior to November 1, 1990, when a veteran passed away, the VA was required to provide a headstone or grave marker unless a family bought a private headstone. For those families, the VA provided a check for the amount, about \$77, it would have spent on a headstone. This amendment will not reenact that policy, which was discontinued due to cost considerations. It simply says that an official VA marker or headstone will be provided for those families that ask for one, and may be placed at a site that they deem to be appropriate. In most cases, families that have placed a private headstone will request a marker—a \$20 brass plate—that would be mounted to the headstone. Surely we can do that much for our veterans in this time of budget surpluses.

This amendment allows the Department of Veterans Affairs to better serve veterans and their families, and I encourage my colleagues to listen to the thousands of veterans' families who simply hope to recognize a family member's military service.

The Greatest Generation gave so much to this country in life, this is the least we can do for them when that life comes to an end.

They did their duty and answered the call to serve. It is up to us to give them the modest recognition that they deserve.

Again, I want to thank the managers for their support and the Senate for adopting the amendment. I am hopeful that this provision will be maintained in the conference report.

COPING WITH A CHANGING KOREAN PENINSULA: AVOIDING RIGIDITY AND IRRATIONAL EXUBERANCE

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I rise to begin a discussion of the tremendous strategic consequences which may flow from events now underway on the Korean Peninsula.

As we debate spending on non-proliferation programs—including support for the Korean Energy Development Organization created by the 1994 Agreed Framework, which was significantly reduced in the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill just passed by the Senate—it is important to keep the big picture in mind. We need to remain flexible in the face of a changing world, avoiding the twin pitfalls of rigidity and what Fed Chairman Alan